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ABSTRACT

This action research is designed to help students improve their writing skills and their confidence in themselves as writers. The targeted population is third graders in a suburban Chicago, Illinois elementary school. Evidence of the need to improve writing skills exists through teacher observation and evaluation of student writing, and scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in writing. There are many probable causes for third grade students' inability to communicate effectively through written language. The writing expectations may not be age appropriate. Many teachers lack adequate training in teaching the writing process. Also, teaching the necessary skills to be a successful writer is a time consuming process. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others suggests that expectations be adjusted to be age appropriate. Teacher training should be offered to help staff become more competent in teaching writing. A variety of motivational writing strategies should be implemented into the writing program to improve the quality of student output. Post intervention data indicated progress in the students' writing skills. Most students became able to write organized and developed essays independently within less than four months. This improvement may have been the result of the writing strategies and activities implemented during the intervention period of September 1, 2000 through December 15, 2000. (Contains 21 references, and 3 figures and 4 tables of data. Appendixes contain a language arts rubric, teacher and student surveys, a writer's checklist, and a color-coded organizer.) (Author/RS)

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING WRITING IN THIRD GRADE

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There are many probable causes for third grade students' inability to communicate effectively through written language. The writing expectations may not be age appropriate. Many teachers lack adequate training in teaching the writing process. Also, teaching the necessary skills to be a successful writer is a time consuming process.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others suggests that expectations be adjusted to be age appropriate. Teacher training should be offered to help staff become more competent in teaching writing. A variety of motivational writing strategies should be implemented into the writing program to improve the quality of student output.

Post intervention data indicated progress in the students' writing skills. Most students became able to write organized and developed essays independently within less than four months. This improvement may have been the result of the writing strategies and activities implemented during the intervention period of September 1, 2000 through December 15, 2000.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

As third grade teachers, the teachers/researchers are faced with the challenge of constructing a fresh look and a redefinition of the practice of improving writing instruction in primary classrooms. Something heroic, something visionary, something adventurous needs to be done to set free a flow of ideas from the minds of young writers (Byrd, Hootman, & Madsen, 1999).

The students in third grade classes at the targeted school exhibited some difficulties with writing skills. Evidence of the need to improve writing existed through teacher observation, scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in writing, and teacher evaluation of student writing portfolios.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research was conducted in one public elementary school in a K-6 building located in a southwestern Chicago suburb. The site was a thirty-year-old, two story brick building on the edge of a large subdivision on a side street with low traffic volume. The school housed kindergarten through sixth grade and was surrounded by parking areas and two newly equipped separate playgrounds.

Total enrollment at the school site was 539 students. Racial/ethnic background of the enrollment was Caucasian, 82.7%; African-American, 6.3%; Hispanic, 3.5%; and Asian/Pacific Islander, 7.4%. Eight percent of students received special education services, and 1.3% received bilingual services. In 1999, the mobility rate was 9.4%. Students eligible for free or reduced lunch made up 5.2% of the student population. The attendance rate was 96.8%, and there were no chronic truants.

According to the Illinois State Report Card, third graders in the targeted school site performed at the following levels on the 1999 ISAT in writing: academic warning, 3%; below standards, 15%; meets standards, 51%; and exceeds standards, 32%. Performance of all third grade students in the state on this same test was as follows: academic warning, 9%; below standards, 35%; meets standards, 50%; and exceeds standards, 6%.

Teachers with bachelor's degrees in the site district were 63.6%, while teachers with master's degrees and above were 36.4%. Teachers in this district had an average of 13 years of teaching experience, and the average teacher's salary was $41,759. Pupil-teacher ratio was 20.8:l, with an average class size of 26. The instructional expenditure per pupil was $3,361.

The site school provided the following services for the students: special education programs including pull-out resource and inclusion, speech, bilingual, Reading Recovery for first grade students only, occupational and physical therapy, and the services of a social worker. A pull-out program for gifted students offered challenges to help develop higher level thinking skills as well as enrichment in reading and math. All students received instruction in music, art, computer, and physical education. Band

was an option during fourth through eighth grades. Other opportunities included after school science club, art club, computer classes, sign language classes, and sports. Before and after school day care program was available for a fee.

Surrounding Community

In 1998, this suburban community population was 21,229. It was an area of mixed ethnic background. Many main roads were lined with strip malls. The community consisted of 80% single family homes and 20% multifamily housing. Most monies allocated to the school district came from homeowners' taxes. Cost of a house in the school site community averaged $200,000 with a range of $115,000 to $750,000, according to the Chicago Tribune web site. Median income in 1998 in this suburb was $73,136. Students from single family homes made up 98% of the site school population, and students from multifamily housing, including government subsidized rentals, account for 2% of the population. Rent for a two bedroom apartment ranged between $750 and $850 monthly.

Three elementary schools (K-6) and a junior high school (7-8) made up the site school district. Students leaving eighth grade from the district attended one of two high schools depending on where they lived. Administration consisted of a superintendent, four principals, and four assistants to the principals.

The district guideline for the time spent daily on language arts was two hours. This block of time included reading, phonics, vocabulary, spelling, grammar, listening, and writing instruction. The suggestion was that a half-hour of that time be devoted daily to writing activities. There was no formal writing program in the district; however, there was a notebook of information on writing instruction provided to teachers. This was

developed by a district committee of teachers and administrators under the guidance of a hired consultant. Four years ago staff development focused on writing for a two-year period. Houghton Mifflin Literature Experience Program was the reading series for grades 1 through 6. It provided many opportunities for writing in response to reading lessons. A committee of teachers and administrators again chose Houghton Mifflin as the new reading/language arts program that was implemented in the school year 2000-2001. This new program incorporated reading with spelling, phonics, vocabulary, grammar, and some writing.

Accountability was an important issue in the site school district. Strategic studies committees were developing multiple assessments in language arts, math, social studies, and science aligned to the Illinois state goals and standards. Other issues in the targeted school district included the planned move of sixth graders to the junior high school building in 2001 and an all day kindergarten program. This program was being piloted in one elementary building during the school year 1999-2000, and kindergarten students from the entire district were bused to this school. Each home school continued to provide half day kindergarten.

National Context of the Problem

How to best teach children to write has been argued, debated, and researched for years. It is a question to which there is still no definitive answer. In the past decade many teachers and researchers have sought to better understand writing instruction (DeGroff, 1992). Both researchers and classroom teachers across the country have been interested in how primary children learn to write and the best methods to use for teaching writing (Drecktrah & Chiang, 1997).

"American students' achievement in writing at the end of the Twentieth Century is an important indicator of whether young adults in the Twenty-First Century will have the skills necessary to express themselves clearly" (Greenwald, Persky, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999, p. 1). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (Greenwald et al., 1998) is America's only ongoing survey of what students know and can do in various subjects. It is one source to help inform the public of students' preparedness in writing. The NAEP writing assessment was administered in 35 states. Illinois, the state in which the school site of this action research is located, was not one of the states included. The framework for this national test was developed by the expertise of writing teachers, researchers, business leaders, and policymakers. At fourth grade level in 1998, the average percentage of students' performance was as follows: 16% below basic, 61% basic, 22% proficient, and 1% advanced. Basic denoted partial mastery of skills. Proficient represented solid performance representing competency. Advanced level signified superior performance (Greenwald et al., 1998). It should be noted that the ISAT in writing is administered in third grade in Illinois while the NAEP writing assessment was administered one year later in students' writing development.

In 1988, corporate America was claiming to be reaping a poor return on its major contribution of tax dollars from public schools in preparing students for jobs as well as adequately preparing them in reading and writing (Perry & Deutschman, 1988). As the demand for technologically trained, skilled workers increases, businesses want to infuse their influences into the schools. "New ideas for cooperation between business and education are emerging as worries about an impending skills gap continue unabated. Abilities such as problem solving, critical thinking, and good writing

and reading comprehension are vital to success in the workplace" (Minehan, 1996, p. 283). Success in school and often later in society is measured by mastery of academic subjects, particularly reading and writing (Jochum, Curran, & Reetz, 1998). Children who do not learn to read and write well in their elementary school years are often high school dropouts. Many of the social problems the nation faces, such as increasing numbers of individuals on welfare, unemployed, or in prisons, can be traced to students who do not get a successful start in literacy (Cunningham & Allington, 1994).

Bereiter expressed concern that schools misdirect young writers by promoting unhealthy attitudes toward writing. Students need to enjoy writing, and it is the teacher's responsibility to make writing as rewarding an experience as possible (as cited in Robinson, 1998). Few students really savor writing. Students have no incentive to develop writing skills if writing is not enjoyable to them. Teachers and many researchers increasingly think that motivation is the critical determinant of student success in writing during elementary school (Miller & Meece, 1999).

Many teachers feel they lack expertise in writing themselves, as well as the teaching of writing (DeGroff, 1992). Supporting children in developing their writing skills can be a daunting task because most teachers do not feel accomplished themselves as writers (Power, 2000). In some cases teachers have never had any formal instruction in the teaching of writing. This is particularly true of teachers educated many years ago.

"I found that if students have one good teacher of writing in their entire career, irrespective of grade level, they could be successful writers. Be that one teacher" (Graves, 1994, p.14). The problem is how to be that one good teacher who inspires students to write.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of the need for strategies to improve third grade writing at the site school, a survey of teachers' opinions on the current state of writing instruction at the site elementary school was given at the teachers' meeting prior to the opening of school, a survey of third grade students' feelings about writing and themselves as writers was administered on the first day of the school year, a writing sample was taken from all third graders on the first day of school and evaluated using the site school district writing rubric (Appendix A), and 1999 ISAT writing scores for the site school were reviewed.

According to the Illinois State Report shown in Figure 1, third graders in the targeted school site performed at the following levels on the 1999 ISAT in writing: academic warning, 3%; below standards, 15%; meets standards, 51%; and exceeds standards, 32%.

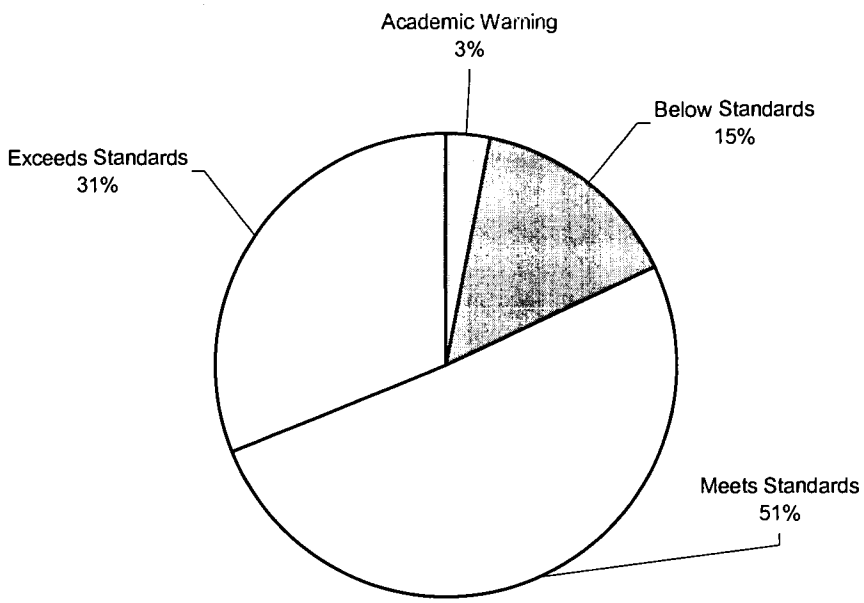

Figure 1. Site school 1999 Illinois state report card in writing _

While these percentages as shown in Figure 1 were considered by the state to be acceptable, the site school and its district were constantly striving to improve the quality of its education and ultimately to improve performance on assessments. It was the researchers' goal to raise the number of students from "academic warning" and "below standards" levels up to the "meets standards" and possibly even "exceeds standards" level. In keeping with setting the goals high, the researchers would have liked to inspire students in writing so that the numbers at exceeds standards level also increased.

Table 1.

Student Feelings About Writing Surveys August Results

		Yes	No
1.	Do you think you are a good writer now?	79%	21%
2.	Do you think you are a better writer than you were at the beginning of second grade?	93%	7%
3.	Do you feel comfortable while you are writing?	79%	21%
4.	Do you think you write as well as other children your age?	65%	35%
5.	Do you think you need help with writing?	34%	66%
6.	Do you enjoy writing?	82%	18%
7.	Is there anything about your writing that you would like to improve?	55%	45%

The August "Feelings About Writing" student surveys (Appendix B) showed that 79% of the students considered themselves to be good at writing as shown in Table 1. The researchers have noticed that these perceptions of themselves as writers was in contrast with the rubric scores of the students' August writing samples as shown in Figure 2. Sixty-six percent felt they did not need help with writing. This may be part of the problem with student performance in writing. The students inaccurately perceive how well they write.

The August writing sample was also taken from all 68 third graders on the second day of school. The writing samples were evaluated using the district rubric for writing (Appendix A). The scores of that sample were the following: Students demonstrated little or no understanding, 18%; beginning understanding, 68%; reasonable understanding, 14%; with no students demonstrating complete understanding, comprehensive understanding, or extended understanding. These percentages are shown in Figure 2.

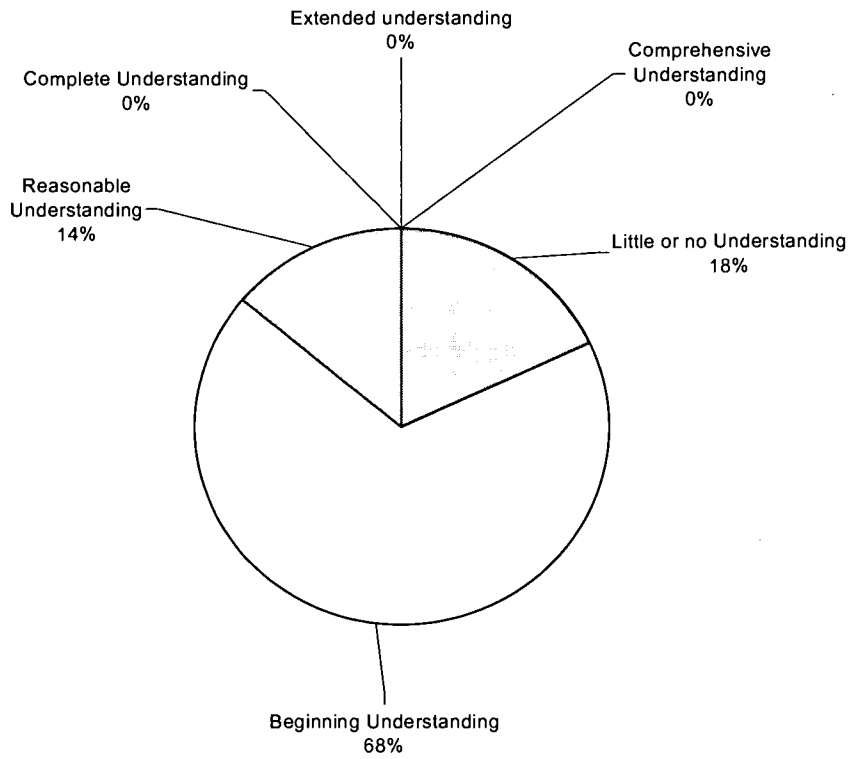

Figure 2. August writing samples

Table 2.

Results of the August Site Teachers Writing Surveys

The scale used was 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Mostly agree, 3 = No opinion, 4 = Mostly disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I had specific course work in college on how to teach writing skills.	1	9	0	8	0
2. I have had adequate training/inservice on how to teach the writing process and skills.	0	12	1	4	1
3. Sufficient materials (i.e. activities, lesson plans) are provided to teach writing to my students.	0	11	3	4	0
4. Teaching the writing process is time consuming.	7	9	2	0	0
5. Conferencing is a necessary step in the writing process.	5	12	0	1	0
6. I feel comfortable teaching writing.	1	9	7	1	0
7. I feel comfortable assessing my students' writing.	0	12	5	1	0
8. Students usually enter a new grade level demonstrating appropriate writing skills.	0	7	5	6	0

Table 2 illustrates the results of the site teachers writing survey (Appendix C). It assessed the teachers' opinions on what they saw as the current state of writing instruction. The survey showed the number of teacher responses according to the scale described at the top of the survey page. The results indicated that more than half of the teachers surveyed "mostly agreed" that they felt prepared for and comfortable with teaching writing.

Probable Causes

Some students at the site school lacked motivation in regard to writing. There were multiple skills involved in writing: mechanics, including grammar and spelling; generating ideas; organization; and use of the writing process. All these skills were challenging to many third grade students.

Bereiter expressed concern that schools misdirect young writers by promoting unhealthy attitudes toward writing. Students needed to enjoy writing, and it was the teacher's responsibility to make writing as rewarding an experience as possible (as cited in Robinson, 1998). Graves (1994) wrote that during the first grade children express themselves easily, but they gradually lose this ease.

Many teachers feel they lack expertise in writing themselves, as well as the teaching of writing (DeGroff, 1992). Supporting children in developing their writing skills was a daunting task because many teachers did not feel accomplished themselves as writers (Power, 2000). In some cases teachers had never had any formal instruction in the teaching of writing. This is particularly true of teachers educated several years ago.

The probable causes of the need to improve writing instruction were as follows: Many students lacked motivation for writing. The multiple skills involved in writing were a challenge for the third grade students. Many teachers lacked formal training in the teaching of writing and did not feel confident or accomplished in writing themselves. Graves (1994) felt that if children have just one good writing teacher in school, they can learn to become good writers. The question in teachers' minds is how to be that one good writing teacher.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Of all of the skills involved in personal expression, writing may be the most versatile and useful. Whether it is used to communicate via technology over great distances or it meets specific business needs, writing is a keystone of personal communication. In an age of burgeoning technology, writing skills will only, over time, become more necessary and valued. Writing also continues to be one of the great art forms. Because it is of such great importance, one might think that the teaching of writing in schools would be organized and refined, guaranteeing success for all students. But it is not. "To become good writers students need expert instruction, frequent practice, and constructive feedback" (Greenwald et al., 1998, p. 9).

Recent research and practice have indicated that focusing on what students do as writers, rather than on theory and grammar, results in more effective written communication (Greenwald et al., 1998). Unfortunately, instruction in the writing process is often a simple linear formula with three stages. In reality, all three stages in the process are interactive. For example, good writers revise at all stages over and over, not only at the completion of their work.

The Writing Process

"Writing is a thinking and doing process, a process with many phases" (Frank, 1995, p.94). It is an essential tool that is needed for life. Students need to become automatic with this process so that they will use it over and over when they write. Once a student learns the writing process, it will be theirs for a lifetime (Frank, 1995). Effective writers, therefore, must keep the targeted reading audience in mind as they write. They should ask themselves, "For whom am I writing this?" Therefore, students must be taught to consider their audience and organize their ideas so that they make sense to the reader (Brown, 1995). To develop the power of writing, students must write on a daily basis (Graves, 1990).

Frank (1995) suggested that teachers can only teach writers not writing

I doubt that any person can actually teach another to write. As teachers we can only...

... unleash the forces of expression.

... awaken sensitivities to the world, to selves, and others.

... prod awareness of feelings, ideas, sensation.

... offer forms for combining words and putting ideas together.

... expose and demonstrate the process for gathering, organizing and expressing those ideas.

... show them how to use tools for saying things clearly.

... consistently expose them to good, effective, interesting writing

(p. 22).

Frank (1995) had a plan for helping students learn and use the writing process. It is a plan with 10 stages to guide students "from beginning blunderings through to polished pieces." The plan is built upon her observations of the way writing happens for students of all ages (Frank, 1995, p. 94).

The following is Frank's "The Writing Process: A 10-Stage Plan That Works":

Stage 1. The Motivation: This stage is what sparks the writing. It provides a situation or makes use of a natural situation to produce ideas, impressions, emotions, and opinions to create possibilities from the mind.

Stage 2. Collecting Impressions: This is brainstorming. It is the gathering of words, fragments, thoughts, facts, phrases, questions, and observations. It broadens the original idea. Ideas are quickly gathered. Teachers need to take plenty of time in this stage. Teachers take down all student ideas if brainstorming is done as a group. If it is done individually, students can write down everything that comes to mind. It is good, too, for the teacher to contribute ideas, impressions, and new words to show how to elaborate on existing ideas.

Stage 3. Organizing: Now students look for which ideas fit together. It is in this stage that graphic organizers can be used, especially if the writing is going to demand elaboration. Some writers, however, are able go directly from collecting impressions to the draft.

Stage 4. The Rough Draft: Teachers at this stage say, "Now, write!" It is the phase of putting it together. Students need guidance through this phase as a group in the beginning to provide the practice for writing alone as they progress. The rough draft phase should be writing without stopping to make corrections.

Stage 5. Author's Review: Students now ask themselves if their writing makes sense and says what they intended for it to say in the correct order without any missing words. This is strictly the writer's own review.

Stage 6. Sharing for Response: Students trade their writing or share it with the teacher for reactions, questions, suggestions, and praise. The help should be only positive. It is important the students realize that they do not have to accept or use all suggestions including those made by the teacher.

Stage 7. Editing and Revising: This is when the changing, fixing, rearranging, and replacing of words goes on. Reworking should by limited to one or two skills or weaknesses at a time. If students try to fix everything at once, their efforts are scattered and nothing is greatly improved. Revision that is focused on only a few things at a time is a good way for students to really improve their writing! Not every piece of writing should be fixed. Some pieces can sit for awhile before changes are made, and some can be excused from revision completely.

Stage 8. The Mechanics Check: This is the point at which the teacher points out errors in spelling, grammar, mechanical, and structural weaknesses. These errors and weaknesses can be marked on the paper or pointed out to the student. Red pen is not a good tool for these marks.

Stage 9. The Final Copy: The preparation of the final draft using all of the input of others regarding content and mechanics occurs at this stage. Some students feel satisfaction and surprise at their writing product as a result of all their work.

Stage 10. Presenting: Presentation and sharing occurs only if the writer chooses to do so. It is the showing-off. It is the chance to communicate written words to others by choice.

Graves (1994) no longer thinks that writing should be the result of any particular methodology. It should be the result of the conditions for learning that the teacher creates in the classroom. These conditions include time, choice, response, demonstration, expectation, room structure, and evaluation.

Time means that writing needs to be taught at least four days of the week and preferably five. If a teacher can only find time for teaching writing once a week, Graves (1994) thinks that teacher should not teach writing at all. Once a week will only encourage poor writing habits leading to a dislike for writing. It takes a great deal of time to show students how to write and how to develop the skills needed to improve as writers. Students need daily writing time.

Choice refers to freedom to pick a topic about which to write. Students need to learn how to choose their own topics. When children know that they will be writing every day, their minds will go to work and think of writing topics. Thinking of a topic once a week is much more difficult for children because thinking about it slips their minds (Graves, 1994).

Response is showing that you take children's choices for writing topics and writing seriously. The first response is a short conference with the teacher as that teacher moves around the classroom during writing time. A few students should have a conference each day. The teacher should keep track of these conferences to be sure that each student gets a teacher response over the period of a few days. Time can be

set aside for sharing one or two students' writing at the end of each class (Graves, 1994).

Listeners can then restate what they have heard and ask questions. There can also be talk about what practices worked and those that did not. The sharing at the end of class confirms for the students that an important condition for writing is that this is a class in which they can experiment and learn (Graves, 1994).

Demonstration refers to the learning environment in the classroom including the teacher's attitude toward writing and how the teacher shows the value of writing. Teachers should demonstrate writing with the students using a think aloud strategy (Graves, 1994).

Expectations should be high for every student. Students need to know that they are expected to learn to write well. Students should be asked how they are trying to become a better writers (Graves, 1994).

Room structure for writing should be highly organized. The students need to feel comfortable and feel that the classroom is highly predictable. This is accomplished when students write each day, and have a routine when writing. The teacher sets up problem solving procedures, circulates among the students conferring with them, and discusses class management problems with the students to help solve them (Graves, 1994).

Evaluation refers to students learning how to evaluate topics and their own writing. The teachers' primary role in evaluation is helping students become part of the process. Children should be able to tell the teacher exactly what they are writing about, where they are in their draft, what they will write next in the piece, and where they need help.

Keeping a portfolio from the beginning of the school year helps students get a feeling for what progress they are making in writing throughout the year (Graves, 1994).

Modeling

Children need to see the teacher write. It helps them to see the value of the skill. Graves (1994) believes that the most important way to help children learn to write is for the teacher to be a writer. Teachers should use think aloud while composing writing in front of the students. Creating mock samples, one showing a writing skill correctly and one showing the same skill incorrectly, will help children understand more easily what makes good writing. Teachers can share their own pieces of writing even in the draft stage. They can point out particular skills in the writing and indicate how it would be if written incorrectly. This contrast helps students better comprehend the skills.

Real literature can be used to show the use of descriptive, interesting words that can make writing come alive. Good work by a student can be shared, of course, only with permission or anonymously. Student work should only be used to model positive elements. Student work should not be used to demonstrate areas for improvement (Areglado & Dill, 1997).

Mechanics

It is important that students are aware of the damage poor conventions do to information presented in the writing. Conventions or mechanics are like sign posts. They help the reader to be able to concentrate on the information. Writers choose words and symbols that allow readers to interpret meaning (Graves, 1994).

When students use conventions correctly, the teacher might say to the student that the capital, period, or comma is correct and ask why it was used. It is important to let

the student know that the correct use of conventions helps make writing understandable (Graves, 1994).

Mini-lessons on conventions help students learn the meaning of newly introduced conventions and reflect on conventions that students already understand. Mini-lessons should be about ten minutes on only one convention. When presenting a mini-lesson, teachers should always emphasize that conventions clarify meaning. A notebook listing conventions covered in mini-lessons helps the teacher keep track of which skills have been taught. Teachers should keep notes about which students need help with which conventions in that same notebook. Students can also keep a skills notebook of the mini-lessons. Transparencies for the overhead projector are helpful in teaching mini-lesson and can be saved for review and reuse (Graves, 1994).

The tone of mini-lessons should be one of discovery not preoccupation with accurate use of conventions on first drafts. Many mini-lessons are about punctuation. They are also about leads, organization, endings, revising, proof reading, description, similes, combining sentences, and possessives (Graves, 1994).

Spelling

Giacobbe told teachers, "I wish teachers wouldn't tell children not to worry about their spelling. What they should say is 'When you write, try your best. Spelling words as best you can is helping your readers'" (as cited in Graves, 1994, p. 255). Spelling matters. It matters more than some realize. Giacobbe also points out that it is not enough for the writer to know what the text says, the reader must know as well. Spelling is a necessary social skill. Spelling, more than any other subject in school is used to indicate social status later in life (Graves, 1994).

Weekly spelling tests can be effective if students are adding to the lists words that will be useful to them in writing. The weekly lists should include high frequency words, two or three personal words that are difficult for the individual student, and two or three words that the individual student wants to use in writing. It is important for students to choose four to six of their own words each week (Graves, 1994).

First drafts need not concentrate on spelling. The flow of ideas should be the focus during the writing of the first draft. There should be growing improvement in both spelling and conventions in first drafts as the students become more automatic with these skills (Graves, 1994).

Once a week there should be one page of writing on which the students try to do their best on conventions and spelling. On this page the teacher should expect to see fewer conventions errors and more words spelled correctly or at least more easily recognizable incorrectly spelled words (Graves, 1994).

Spelling books, according to Cohen's 1968 study, (as cited in Graves, 1994) showed little relationship between weekly word list skill exercises and children's spelling success. Lists of high frequency words by Fry and colleagues (1985) are useful. Certain words are used again and again and must be learned (Graves, 1994).

Many young writers become immobilized in their writing when coming to a word that they cannot spell correctly. These students need to be reassured that it is fine to write as much of the word as they are able to figure out and leave a blank to finish the word later with help from the teacher. This goes back to making sure that the student understands that the first draft is not a time to be so concerned about spelling but rather with the flow of ideas (Graves, 1994). If students think that they will be heavily

evaluated on spelling, they will use only words of which they are sure of the spelling, stop the flow of ideas, and write shorter and less interesting pieces (Frank, 1995).

Descriptive Writing

A good starting point for helping students learn to write descriptively is through literature which the teacher reads aloud to students while calling attention to good descriptions and interesting words that give the readers vivid pictures in their minds. When children are immersed in good literature and given the opportunity to talk about it, they may become better writers. Reading to children stimulates thought and increases a vocabulary of interesting, descriptive words, especially if the teacher calls attention to some of the words and the pictures they create in the mind. It would spoil students' appreciation of literature for the teacher to dissect all words and pictures (Stewig, 1980).

Children should also be encouraged to read widely themselves. They should read to themselves, their peers, and younger children. Reading what other children write is also important. Teachers need to point out that the material was written by children. The purpose of reading children's writing is to help children see that reading and writing are closely connected. They need to be aware that writing is not just something adults do (Stewig, 1980).

Learning to notice minute details helps writing. Writers are noticers (Greenberg, 1994). Children need to be guided to develop skill in observing their surroundings. Close observation of other students may be a good way to develop the skill of written description. Two volunteers might stand in front of a class. The teacher should encourage children to tell what they notice as long as it is not negative. Students should be encouraged to look at the subjects minutely for descriptors. By having two

students to observe, comparison can be used. For third graders, practice writing descriptions of themselves including minute descriptions may be a good place to begin, followed by writing such a good description of a classmate that other students can guess who was described. Children should eventually notice that a good physical description of an individual includes aspects of height, weight, hair color and style, style and color of clothing, and posture (Stewig, 1980).

Discussing characteristics that give clues in literature to what a character is like inside helps students learn to describe personality. Examples of these clues might include what a character does and feels such as being fun loving, thoughtful, obedient, responsible, and willing to work. Reading picture books to third graders and discussing character description with students is very effective (Stewig, 1980).

Also, discussion of descriptors for the setting can follow the reading of literature. Discussion can include visual, spatial, tactile, auditory, and olfactory descriptors. Students can practice writing descriptions of their classroom or their room at home for starters. Students, who often describe the setting minimally or not at all, need to be encouraged to describe it based on the visual, spatial, tactile, auditory, and olfactory characteristics. Asking students to close their eyes to do this is sometimes helpful.

Providing a writing problem directly from a well known piece of literature such as Charlotte's Web can serve as motivation as well as an example of good description of setting. The teacher can read the description of Charlotte's home, the barn. After discussing the sights, smells, sounds, touches, and tastes described, the students can observe their own home that evening with these things in mind. The next day the

students can be given an opportunity in a mini-writing piece to describe their homes in the way that E. B. White described Charlotte's home (Stewig, 1980).

Similes are wonderful vehicles for descriptive writing. Again, using literature that is rich in similes may be helpful. First, the concept must be introduced by reading samples of writing and calling attention to the similes as they are used in making comparisons. Later, children can be asked to write similes starting by the use of "simile stems" such as brave as _____; as scared as _____; as slow as _____; and like a _____. Whole class work in creating their own similes in a good way to continue, followed by individuals or pairs working on creating original similes (Stewig, 1980).

At first students will want to use common similes such as "busy as a bee." Teachers should tell students that it is important to try to write their own comparisons rather than using ones they have heard before (Stewig, 1980).

The ability to write similes in isolation is one thing; the ability to include them effectively in writing is a much more difficult skill. When the teacher feels the students are ready, the students may be encouraged to add similes into their writing. At first, students will overuse them. As the children progress in writing, they should be encouraged to be more selective in the use of similes (Stewig, 1980).

An activity for working with similes is the teacher makes a sound and then asks the students what they think it sounds like. Sounds that might be used are a pencil sharpener, a wall map moving up and down, or fingernails scratching on a chalkboard. The students try to think of the most amazing thing that the sample sounds like (Greenberg, 1994).

Another activity is to draw a simple squiggle on the board. The students dictate to the teacher what it looks like. The teacher tells the students that pretend answers are fine (Greenberg, 1994).

Also, picture writing is a lesson in the power of use of the simile. Students learn from this activity to articulate images by comparing them to something else. The teacher draws an object on the board and asks the students what it looks like. A good example would be a picture of a doorknob might look like a mushroom, or an umbrella. Then the students as a group, with a partner, and finally as individuals, might try to make similes for a water fountain, a full moon, spaghetti, a swamp, a bald head, or a clock. As a follow-up to this, the student can make up a little story about something like the moon, a clock, or anything turned into the thing it looks like. Variations on this lesson can be how the students' sense of what things are like depends on mood. For example, "When I am sad, the rain looks like me crying" (Greenberg, 1994, p. 3). The students can also describe themselves and members of their families using similes (Greenberg, 1994).

Proof Reading

Children must be taught how to proof read their own work. They need to learn to read to be sure that their piece of writing is about only one thing. This is the most important first step in proof reading their own writing. There also must be that one sentence that tells readers the focus of the entire piece. Students should be trained to look for this sentence during proof reading. After checking the focus of the paper and the statement of the main idea of the composition, third graders need to be taught to look for nouns and verbs in the piece. A mini-lesson can teach students to use stronger or more interesting nouns and verbs in some places and to stay with their first word

choices in others. It can also be helpful to point out to children the ways professional writers use strong, interesting words in reading anthologies and in literature that is read aloud to them (Graves, 1994).

It builds confidence for students to look for some good lines in their first draft that can be kept without change. These lines can help capture the spontaneity of their first draft. It gives children an awareness of their strong work to build on (Graves, 1994).

Children need to learn to delete sentences which are not needed. Students may be able to do this best if they first try to decide which part of the piece of writing is important. This may lead to being able to delete the least important sentences.

When students can judge what in their writing is good and tell why, they are becoming better writers as well as better evaluators of their own writing (Graves, 1994).

Revising

Children think when they get their words down on paper that they are finished, and they do not want to go back over their writing to make improvements. It is difficult to get students at this level to revise. Part of being able to revise their own writing is developmental, but there are ways that teachers can help (Graves, 1994).

Questions such as "What did you have in mind? What might be a better way to say this? Shall we take another look at this part?" help guide children to reflect on their writing (Graves, 1994, p. 226). Teachers modeling, reflecting, and revising with their own writing in front of a class helps students to observe how it is done. Modeling teaches children how to rethink and attempt to make their own revisions. This will most likely have to be done many times before children begin to be able to revise independently. The teacher not only must model how to revise but must work to help

students develop a trust of their own thinking when revising independently (Graves, 1994).

If a young writer decides there are more ideas to be added to a piece of writing, often the insertion will be placed at the end. When conferencing with a student and hearing that student read a piece of writing, it is often possible to observe a part about which the child shows more enthusiasm. Ask if the student has more that could be told about that part. Next, the teacher should ask where that additional information could be added. It helps for children to realize that an asterisk can be drawn at that spot and the insertion can be written on a separate piece of paper to be inserted when and if the piece is brought to final form. It also helps if a child understands that an insertion can simply be one or two sentences (Graves, 1994).

Young writers should be taught to be flexible about what they write. The words that they put down in a first draft can be changed (Graves, 1994). The spelling can be fixed; stronger, more interesting words can be substituted; and words can be inserted where they have been left out.

Mechanical correction is the most common type of revision. It is correcting spelling, capitalization, and punctuation (Graves, 1994). A good deal of mechanical correction or correction of conventions can be done in small groups with the teacher or in pairs with peers. Pairs can focus on the skill to be fixed. Students become good at correcting their own writing if they work on just one skill at a time (Frank, 1995). As the months pass, the students should be able to make a broad range of corrections at one time. Students should also be taught to realize that dictionaries and thesauruses are an important part

of making revisions in their writing. Mini-lessons can review the use of dictionaries for checking spelling, and thesauruses for finding more interesting and stronger words.

Graves (1994) states that most of what children write does not need to be revised. Most writing students do is first draft only. Young writers such as third graders should be writing so much during a day that they could not possibly revise it all. However, an occasional piece should definitely be selected to be brought to final copy.

Peer Conferencing

Peer conferencing is a strategy that can be used to accomplish editing and revising. Students can read first drafts to each other. They can ask questions to help clarify meaning. They can work together to make mechanical corrections in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Students must understand, however, that the writer makes the final decision on changes to be made (Calkins, 1994).

Teacher/Student Conferencing

Much of the best help a teacher can give to student writers during the writing process is to sit with them to enjoy and respond to the first draft of a written piece. A teacher can conference with around six to eight students each day. It is important during conferencing that a student be able to state the main idea of their piece of writing (Graves, 1994). This time can also be used to teach a brief mini-lesson on a skill weakness of the student (Frank, 1995). In the writing conference students should encouraged to use what they already know. Often they feel they do not have ideas when they do. The conferences should be short with the students doing most of the talking. The conferences should end with what the student can do in order to move on with a piece of work. The student needs to leave the conference with a feeling of where

the piece of writing is and what will come next. Most important, the conference should always have a positive tone. Other students will hear the encouragement being given in conferences and feel more confident about what they are writing and learn from what they hear the teacher saying to others (Graves, 1994).

Portfolios

A portfolio is where a student's selected work is kept. It can be a folder, a notebook, or a box such as a cereal box. Two portfolios are usually used. One portfolio is where all writing from the beginning of the year is kept, and another portfolio is where carefully selected student work is kept. Students select what goes into this second portfolio. Some states are beginning to consider portfolios as an alternative to standardized testing (Graves, 1994).

There are essentials in keeping portfolios. All students keep selected writing in portfolios. Students make the decision about what goes into their portfolios. Each time students put a selection into their portfolio, they must justify why they chose it. Students receive responses to this writing collection from both teachers and peers (Graves, 1994).

Teachers who want to transition from simply keeping student writing in folders to portfolios should ask their students after about a month of the school year to select five pieces of writing from their folders that interest them. These can be pieces that made them laugh, that they learned from, that they worked hard on, or that they felt was their best. Post-it notes can be used to label pieces: like, surprise, laugh, good first line, learned something, same old writer, good description, did not like, writing time ran out,

or rework—it has promise. This teaches students to look at their writing and learn ways to evaluate it (Graves, 1994).

Portfolios shift responsibility to students. Students can be taught how to maintain their own portfolios. Teachers move from correctors to guides. Not every piece of writing is reviewed by the teacher. Some grading responsibility shifts to the students. Students learn how to evaluate their writing, fill out their own rubrics for it, and justify how they made their decisions. The teacher already knows when looking at a piece of writing how the student felt about it (Graves, 1994). Notes can be taken by the teacher on what students' portfolios tell about their progress and needs as writers. This information can guide writing instruction (Frank, 1995).

Portfolios provide a rich sense of children's perception of themselves as writers. They get a realistic sense of what they need to learn to be better writers (Graves, 1994).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of implementing writing strategies and activities during the period September 1, 2000 to December 15, 2000, the third grade students at the targeted elementary school will improve their writing skills as measured by student writing surveys and writing samples evaluated by the teachers/researchers using the site school district language arts rubric.

In order to accomplish the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Students and teachers will be surveyed regarding their feelings about writing.
2. Strategies will be implemented that will foster better writing skills by the students.

Project Action Plan

The following outline describes the implementation of writing strategies used for this action research project. The schedule is approximately twelve weeks in length. The outline is organized week by week.

Week 1
- Teachers/researchers administer faculty survey (Appendix C) at first staff meeting
- Teachers/researchers tabulate results
- Teachers/researchers distribute parent consent letters on first full day of school
- Teachers/researchers administer student survey on first full day of school (Appendix B)
- Teachers/researchers tabulate student results
- Students produce samples on second full day of school using the prompt "My Favorite Day This Summer"

Week 2
- Teachers/researchers score writing samples from second day of school using district language arts rubric (Appendix A)
- In the classroom teachers/researchers model the writing process
- Students write daily

Weeks 3 & 4
- Teachers/researchers introduce color coded organizer (Appendix E)
- Teachers/researchers begin continual instruction of grammar skills and spelling
- Students write daily

Weeks 5 & 6
- Teachers/researchers continue instruction using color coded organizer (Appendix H)
- Teachers/researchers teach proofreading and editing skills
- Teachers/researchers introduce writing checklist (Appendix D)
- Teachers/researchers conference with individual students
- Students write daily

Weeks 7 – 11
- Teachers/researchers continue to guide work by students on skills already introduced
- Teachers/researchers introduce descriptive writing activities
- Peer editing by students and teachers/researchers conferencing with students
- Students write daily

Week 12

- Students produce post writing sample using the prompt ("My Favorite Day So Far This School Year")
- Teachers/researchers administer post survey to students (Appendix B)
- Teachers/researchers tabulate student surveys
- Teachers/researchers score post writing samples using district language arts rubric

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the third graders growth in writing, the teachers/researchers will use the site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A) for evaluating the writing samples from the second day of school and from December. The results of the "Feelings About Writing" student surveys (Appendix B) that were given on the first day of school in August and again December will be tabulated.

CHAPTER 4

Project Results

Historical Description and the Intervention

The objective of this action research project was to improve third grade writing skills. In August, writing surveys (Appendix C) were given to all teachers and to all the third graders at the site school to obtain their feelings about writing (Appendix B). Baseline writing samples were done by all the third graders on the second day of school. The site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A) was used to evaluate these writing samples.

Writing instruction began on the day following the August 2000 baseline writing samples. The students wrote for approximately 30 minutes daily throughout the September 1, 2000 through December 15, 2000 intervention period. Instruction began in September with persuasive writing followed by expository writing in November 2000. Narrative writing was not taught during the intervention period. On September 1, 2000, spelling and grammar instruction also began and continued throughout the intervention period.

During September 2000, instruction was centered around teachers modeling writing and classes writing essays as whole cooperative groups. The color coded organizer (Appendix E) was introduced. This consisted of underlining the topic sentence of an

essay in black and each reason or detail given in red, blue, and green. This coding method was carried on throughout the essay. Students used their crayons to color code their own writing in this way to organize their ideas.

During October 2000, persuasive writing instruction continued. Teacher modeling also continued for the instruction of secondary support including specific names, names of places, dates, examples, similes, and other relevant details. Individual writing conferences with students were conducted by the teachers. Students were taught editing and the use of the student writing checklist (Appendix D). This checklist helped students self-monitor their writing.

During November 2000, expository writing instruction began. Word posters were displayed in the classrooms and the use of the thesaurus was taught to help students make more interesting word choices. Similes were introduced and modeled to guide the third graders in the appropriate use of similes for adding description and interest to their writing.

Student writing was shared anonymously and analyzed by whole group discussion. Individual conferencing between students and teachers continued to guide the students' progress with writing skills. Reviewing the writing portfolios that had been started in September gave the targeted students a sense of their own progress.

The interventions concluded on December 14, 2000. Post-intervention writing samples and student "Feelings About Writing Surveys" (Appendix B) were done on December 15, 2000. Both were used to evaluate the students' growth in writing skills and to analyze changes in the students' feelings about themselves as writers. The same language arts rubric (Appendix A) was used to evaluate post-writing samples.

The Presentation and Analysis of Results

Table 2, "Results of the Site Teachers August Writing Survey," illustrates the assessment of teachers' opinions of what they saw as the current state of writing instruction. The survey showed the number of teacher responses according to the scale described at the top of the survey page. The results indicated that the teachers mostly agreed that they felt prepared for and comfortable with teaching writing, which is not what the teachers/researchers expected. The teachers/researchers had expected that the educators surveyed would not feel prepared or comfortable with teaching writing.

Table 2.

Results of the August Site Teachers Writing Surveys

The scale used was 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Mostly agree, 3 = No opinion, 4 = Mostly disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I had specific course work in college on how to teach writing skills.	1	9	0	8	0
2.	I have had adequate training/inservice on how to teach the writing process and skills.	0	12	1	4	1
3.	Sufficient materials (i.e. activities, lesson plans) are provided to teach writing to my students.	0	11	3	4	0
4.	Teaching the writing process is time consuming.	7	9	2	0	0
5.	Conferencing is a necessary step in the writing process.	5	12	0	1	0
6.	I feel comfortable teaching writing.	1	9	7	1	0
7.	I feel comfortable assessing my students' writing.	0	12	5	1	0
8.	Students usually enter a new grade level demonstrating appropriate writing skills	0	7	5	6	0

August baseline, pre-intervention, writing samples, and December post-intervention writing samples were evaluated using the site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A). These pre-intervention and post-intervention results were tabulated. The results are shown on the pre-intervention Figure 2, "August Writing Samples," and the post-intervention Figure 3, "December Writing Samples."

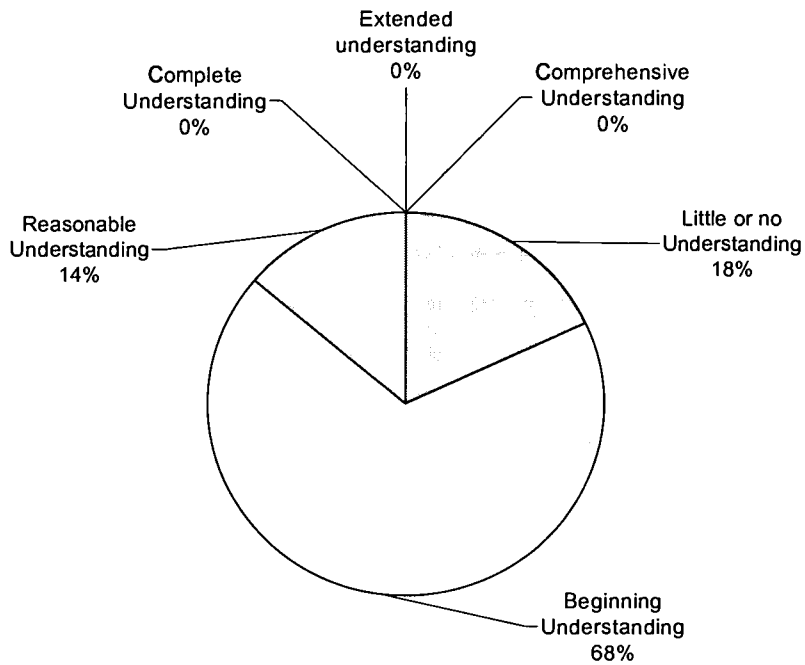

Figure 2. August writing samples

August writing samples were taken from all 68 third graders on the second day of school. The writing samples were evaluated using the site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A). The scores of those samples shown on Figure 2 were the following: Students demonstrated little or no understanding, 18%; beginning understanding, 68%; reasonable understanding, 14%, with no students demonstrating complete understanding, comprehensive understanding, or extended understanding.

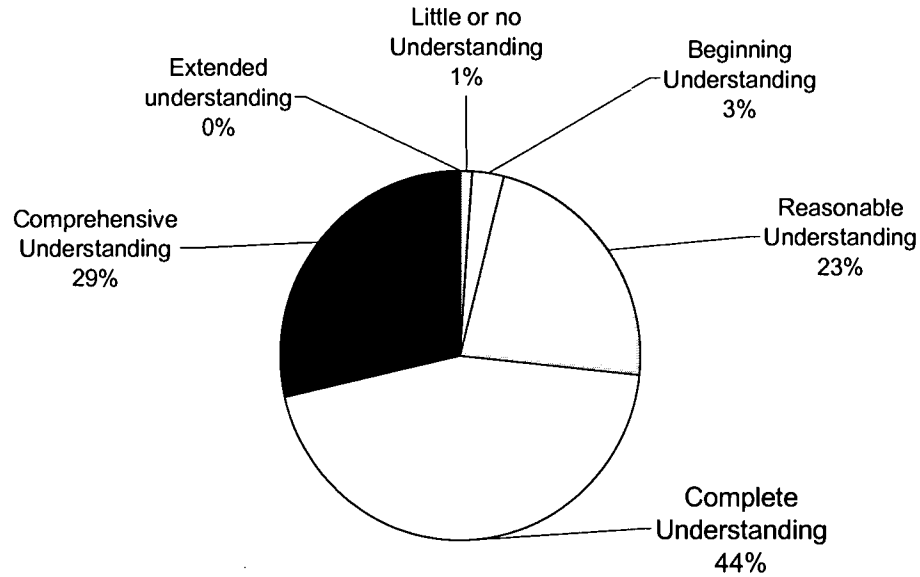

Figure 3. December writing samples

Writing samples were also taken from all third graders on the last day of the intervention period, December 15, 2000. The writing samples were evaluated using the same site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A). The scores of those samples shown on Figure 3 were the following: Students demonstrated little or no understanding, 0%; beginning understanding, 3%; reasonable understanding, 23 %; complete understanding, 45%; comprehensive understanding, 29%; and extended understanding, 0%.

The following are comparisons of the August and December writing samples scores as evaluated by the same site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A) and are shown on Figures 2 and 3. Students demonstrated little or no understanding August, 18%, December, 0%; beginning understanding August, 68%, December, 3%; reasonable understanding August, 14%, December, 22%; complete understanding

August, 0%, December, 45%; comprehensive understanding August, 0%, December, 29%; and extended understanding August, 0%, December, 0%.

Table 1.

Student Feelings About Writing Surveys August Results

	Yes	No
1. Do your think you are a good writer now?	79%	21%
2. Do you think you are a better writer than you were at the beginning of second grade?	93%	7%
3. Do you feel comfortable while you are writing?	79%	21%
4. Do you think you write as well as other children your age?	65%	35%
5. Do you think you need help with writing?	34%	66%
6. Do you enjoy writing?	82%	18%
7. Is there anything about your writing that you would like to improve?	55%	45%

The "Feelings About Writing" August surveys (Appendix B) show that 79% considered themselves to be good at writing. The teachers/researchers noticed that these perceptions of themselves as writers were in contrast with the rubric scores of the students' August writing samples as shown on Figure 2. Sixty-six percent felt they did not need help with writing. These percentages are shown on Table 1. This may be part of the problem with student performance in writing. The students inaccurately perceived how well they wrote.

Table 3.

Student Feelings about Writing Surveys December Results

		Yes	No
1.	Do your think you are a good writer now?	82%	18%
2.	Do you think you are a better writer than you were at the beginning of second grade?	85%	15%
3.	Do you feel comfortable while you are writing?	76%	24%
4.	Do you think you write as well as other children your age?	56%	44%
5.	Do you think you need help with writing?	39%	61%
6.	Do you enjoy writing?	71%	29%
7.	Is there anything about your writing that you would like to improve?	82%	18%

The "Feelings About Writing" December student surveys (Appendix B) given on December 15 showed that 82% considered themselves to be good at writing. In August, 79% thought they were good writers. In December, 76% responded that they felt comfortable while writing compared, with 79% in August. In December, 56% thought they wrote as well as other children their age compared with 65% in August. In December, 71% enjoyed writing compared with 82% in August. In December, 82% wanted to improve something about their writing; and in August, 55% wanted to improve something about their writing. These percentage comparisons are shown in Table 4. Some of these percentages, in the teachers'/researchers' opinions, showed

misperceptions by the students of themselves as writers, especially in August. In December, more students did consider themselves to be good writers than in August.

Table 4.

Student Feelings About Writing Surveys August and December Results

		Yes		No	
		Aug.	Dec.	Aug.	Dec.
1.	Do you think you are a good writer now?	79%	82%	21%	18%
2.	Do you think you are a better writer than you were at The beginning of second grade?	93%	85%	7%	15%
3	Do you feel comfortable while you are writing?	79%	76%	21%	24%
4	Do you think you write as well as other children your age?	65%	56%	35%	44%
5	Do you think you need help with writing?	34%	39%	66%	61%
6	Do you enjoy writing?	82%	71%	18%	29%
7	Is there anything about your writing that you would like to improve?	55%	82%	45%	18%

During the intervention period of September 1, 2000 through December 15, 2000, students in the targeted population showed growth in writing skills. The students in the targeted third grade group had writing instruction and wrote for approximately 30 minutes every school day. Step-by-step essay writing modeled by teachers as well as essays created cooperatively by the students as whole classes helped students begin to learn the organization of persuasive and expository writing and also helped to improve writing skills. Ideas began to flow more easily for the targeted students. A color coded organizer (Appendix E) was used to help with the organization of persuasive and

expository writing. The color coding consisted of underlining the topic sentence of the piece of writing in black and the reasons or supporting details in red, blue, and green. Word posters were displayed in the classrooms to help students to make more interesting word choices. Thesauruses were also made available. Similes were taught and modeled. Students' writing portfolios were maintained to give the targeted students an opportunity to observe their own growth. Writing activities were designed to be motivating and to make connections to the students' lives and interests.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the pre-intervention and post-intervention data, the targeted students showed improvement in the writing skills. This is clearly shown in Figure 2, "August Writing Samples," and in Figure 3, the "December Writing Samples."

According to the December "Feelings About Writing Surveys" (Appendix B), as shown in Table 3, there was a small increase in the percentage of targeted students who considered themselves to be good at writing. There was also a slight decrease in the percentage of students who felt comfortable while writing. It is the teachers'/researchers' belief that the decrease in comfort while writing may have been due to several factors. In August, students entering third grade may have been more comfortable while writing because they had experienced success with the expectations of second grade writing. The students did not realize what would be required to compose a well developed essay. It was necessary to learn many new skills. According to A. Maslow (Joyce & Weil, 1996), it is necessary to endure discomfort when using new and unfamiliar skills. This may explain why eight-to-nine year-old third

graders with varied backgrounds and life experiences felt more uncomfortable and possibly overwhelmed while learning to write the compositions expected of third graders by the Illinois State Standards. These factors may also have influenced the children's decreased enjoyment of writing from the "Feelings About Writing Surveys" (Appendix B) in August to the "Feelings About Writing Surveys" in December as shown in Table 4.

The teachers/researchers concluded that the "Feelings About Writing Surveys" (Appendix B) may have been inappropriate for use with third graders on the first day of the school year in August. The students may have been too anxious to try to please the teachers with their responses. Administering the surveys the second week of school would be the recommendation of the teachers/researchers.

Teachers modeling writing was an effective way of giving students examples of how to write. Children needed to see their teachers write. It helped them see the value of the skill (Graves, 1994). Graves (1994) believed that the most important way to help children learn to write is for them to see their teachers as a writers with the teachers thinking aloud while composing in front of them. Whole classes writing as a groups also helped students who had difficulty with the flow of ideas.

Writing every day was an important part of the intervention period. Graves said that if teachers can only find time for teaching writing once a week, he believed that teachers should not teach writing at all. It takes a great deal of time to show students how to write and how to develop the skills needed to improve (Graves, 1994). The teachers/researchers strongly believed that daily writing was essential in building a good third grade writing program.

The color coded organizer (Appendix E) helped students to visualize the structure of persuasive and expository writing. The use of the same color coding with crayons on their own writing helped them to visualize the correct organization. It was the teachers/researchers' opinion that in the beginning using the structure of the color coding helped the students to understand and to learn the structure. As the students gained understanding of the organization, it was important that they be allowed to become less rigid in the use of the structure.

The teachers/researchers also found that, in the early months of third grade, the most progress in writing could be made when the daily writing was limited to one paragraph with writing instruction preceding the students' independent writing time. One paragraph was not overwhelming to the third graders. It allowed the students to concentrate on the flow of ideas instead of worrying about the length of the piece they are writing. It also made it easier for third graders to apply the daily instruction that they received to a manageable amount of writing. One paragraph a day seemed to be age appropriate for third grade students. A paragraph a day gave students one week to work on producing a good five paragraph essay.

Sharing student writing anonymously, discussing, and analyzing it as whole groups was of benefit. Individual conferencing with the teachers guided the students' progress. Viewing their portfolios gave the targeted students a sense of their progress.

To improve third grade writing skills the teachers/researchers recommend all of the strategies used as interventions that are discussed in this action research project. This recommendation is based on the results as shown in the December post-intervention data presented in Figure 3.

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, the students showed a marked improvement in their writing skills between the August and the December writing samples. This is shown on the "August Writing Samples," Figure 2, and the "December Writing Samples," Figure 3. This improvement may have been the result of the writing strategies and activities implemented during the period of September 1, 2000 through December 15, 2000. The third grade students at the targeted elementary school improved their writing skills as measured by the student writing surveys and writing samples evaluated by the teachers/researchers using the site school district language arts rubric (Appendix A).

Graves (1994) no longer thinks that writing should be the result of any particular methodology. It is the result of conditions for learning that teachers create in their classrooms, which include time, choices, responses, demonstrations, expectations, room structure, and evaluations. "I found that if students had one good teacher of writing in their entire career, irrespective of grade level, they could be successful writers" (Graves, 1994, p. 14).

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APPENDICIES

RUBRIC

1 Little or No Understanding	2 Beginning Understanding	3 Reasonable Understanding	4 Complete Understanding	5 Comprehensive Understanding	6 Extended Understanding
	Major Errors		Minor Problems	Few Minor Errors	Nearly Error Free
Minimal or No Attempt	Attempted	Partially Developed	Essentials Present	Cohesive	Well developed
Insufficient	No Support	Basic Elements Present	Position Clear	Connections	Secondary Support
Incomplete	Lacks Clarity	Lacks Direction	Clear Plan	Involvement	Exemplary
Not Acceptable	Below Expectations	Acceptable	Meets Expectations	Above Expectations	Beyond Expectations
No organization	Little Organization	Some Organization	Acceptable Organization	Well Organized	Thorough
No Apparent Strategy	Minimally Acceptable	Lacks Unity	---	---	Complete Accurate Solution

Name_____

Date_____

FEELINGS ABOUT WRITING SURVEY

1. Do you think you are a good writer now? Yes No

2. Do you think you are a better writer than you were at the beginning of second grade? Yes No

3. Do you feel comfortable while you are writing? Yes No

4. Do you think you write as well as other children your age? Yes No

5. Do you think you need help with writing? Yes No

6. Do you enjoy writing? Yes No

7. Is there anything about your writing that you would like to improve? Yes No

Appendix C
Teacher Survey

Grade Level: _____

Date: _____

To: Mark DeLay Teachers

From: Linda Doyle, Anna Marie Lovett & Debbie Pellicci

Subject: Writing Survey

We are a group of primary educators currently enrolled in a Master's program at Saint Xavier University. As part of a research project we are asking for your opinions on what you see as the current state of writing instruction. Please provide your honest feedback. The results of this survey will not be used for anything other than our class work. Thank you for your valuable input.

For each statement circle the number that best shows how you feel. Use the following scale: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Mostly agree, 3 = No opinion, 4 = Mostly disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

1.	I had specific course work in college on how to teach writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have had adequate training/service on how to teach the writing process and skills.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Sufficient materials (i.e. activities, lesson plans) are provided to teach writing to my students.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Teaching the writing process is time consuming.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Conferencing is a necessary step in the writing process.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I feel comfortable teaching writing.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I feel comfortable assessing my student's writing.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Students usually enter a new grade level demonstrating appropriate writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

WRITING CHECKLIST

_____Catchy opening!

_____Transition words open all paragraphs except the first paragraph

_____Varied beginnings and lengths of sentences

_____Feelings mentioned and described in each paragraph

_____Various interesting describing words used throughout

_____Interesting, colorful vocabulary used throughout

_____Secondary support, 1 or more sentences telling more about each new idea, present throughout

_____Specific details included as secondary support---names, names of places, dates, ages of children, and examples

_____At least one simile included and used appropriately

_____Strong, memorable closing!

COLOR CODED ORGANIZER FOR PERSUASIVE AND EXPOSITORY WRITING

I think my parents should let me go trick-or-treating on Halloween. I am old enough. I would be careful. I love all the candy.

To begin, I think I am old enough. I am eight and half years old. I am beginning my third month in third grade. Third graders are supposed to be becoming responsible. A lot of my eight-year-old, third-grade friends are going to be allowed to trick-or-treat.

Also, I would be extremely careful! I would go with two of my friends and one of their moms. I would not wear a mask. I would just wear make-up. I would be very careful crossing streets. I would not go to houses that did not have the porch light lit. I would not eat any candy until my parents examined it.

Finally, I love all the Halloween candy! I like to get the M & M's. The chocolate inside is so good. I like the different colors of the pieces. I hope I would get Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Candy with peanut butter is my favorite. Maybe I would get Snickers mini bars. The peanuts, caramel, and chocolate are really yummy. I would eat the candy responsibly. Mom could put one item in my sack lunch each day. Maybe I could have one thing after school as a snack.

To summarize, those are the reasons I think my parents should let me trick-or-treat on Halloween. I think that I'm old enough. I'd be very careful! I love the candy and would eat it wisely! I hope my parents agree that I should be allowed to go trick-or-treating this Halloween.

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